

THE DOCTRINE OF RECONCILIATION Chapter 23 Its Reception-Continued

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Transcript

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Chapter 23

Its Reception-Continued

In our last we sought to show that the words "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20) are not an exhortation unto saints to acquiesce in the Divine providences or to render submission to His discipline and ordinances, but instead, that they form part of an account which the apostle was giving of his evangelical commission, of what his message was to men at large, and therefore those words express the call which the Gospel makes to the unsaved. Before turning from that verse let us point out that there is an expression in it which supplies an incidental yet very real and strong confirmation of what has been frequently insisted upon in this series. Again and again we have pointed out that in connection with reconciliation God is viewed specifically in His official and governmental (rather than in His essential or paternal) character, as Rector or Judge. In full accord with this His servants are here referred to as "ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech"—in no other connection are ministers of the Gospel so designated! After all that was pointed out under our fourth main division (its Arrangement), when we dwelt at length on the glorious provision of the Everlasting Covenant, and all that was brought forward under our fifth division (its Effectuation), when we showed how Christ carried out all He had engaged Himself to do under that Covenant and the reward He earned—a "seed" for the travail of His soul; it might be thought that the elect were absolved and reconciled to God the moment the Saviour triumphantly cried "It is finished." But not so. As Charnock pointed out, "We must distinguish between reconciliation designed by God, obtained by Christ, offered by the Gospel, and received by the soul." It is through failing to recognize and bear in mind those very real and necessary distinctions that we confuse ourselves, confounding what should be kept separate. It was their failure to distinguish between totally different aspects of the Truth which led some Arminians into teaching the gross error that the entire human race was reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, though most of them know it not. For the purpose of simplification the fourfold distinction drawn by Charnock may be reduced unto a twofold one. A reconciliation which, in the language of lawyers, is *de jure* and one which is *de facto*, or in theological terms, the impetration or purchase of reconciliation by Christ and the application of it to us or our actual receiving of the same. This will be more intelligible to the average reader if we remind him of the difference between having a legal right to a thing and a right in it. Such is the case with a minor with reference to an inheritance. If but ten

years old when his father died and willed an estate to him, as soon as the will was proved, he had a legal right to the estate—none else could claim it; but not until he was twenty-one could he enter into possession and enjoyment of it. The Holy Spirit uses that very figure in Gal. 4:1-7 when treating of dispensational differences of privilege under the old and new covenants. It is by observing this fundamental distinction that we obviate a difficulty which a first reading of 2 Corinthians 5 might occasion. There we read "God has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ" (v. 18), and then the call is made "be reconciled" (v. 20). But there is nothing whatever inconsistent between those two statements, or anything in them which should puzzle us. Paul was not there essaying a systematic exposition of the doctrine of reconciliation, but instead, was giving an account of his evangelical ministry or message in connection with it. As was shown in our last—by the quotation from T. Goodwin—that "ministry" consists of two parts: a reconciliation wrought on God's part and a reconciliation on our part toward God. The latter being equally necessary as the former. It is necessary because since the alienation exists on each side, both parties must set aside their enmity before amity is possible. It is necessary in order to the enforcement of human responsibility. It is necessary for us to be reconciled to God because that is what He requires of us, as the way He has appointed. But let us amplify that a little. While a great deal has been written to show that in the transactions between the Father and the Mediator God determined to take full satisfaction unto His justice, and therefore ordained that His Son should be offered a sacrifice, much less has been written to demonstrate that the holiness of God required we must cease our revolt against Him before He can be reconciled to us or receive us into His favor. Yet the one is as true, as important, as necessary, as essential as the other. God is as jealous in the vindication and glorifying of one of His attributes as He is of another, and therefore if on the one hand we read that Christ is set forth "a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness" and "that He might be just and the Justifier of him that believes in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25, 26); on the other hand, we are told that He "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9), addressing us thus: "as He which has called you is holy, so be holy in all manner of behavior." In the wondrous and perfect salvation which God planned and provided for His people, infinite wisdom saw to it that each of His perfections should be owned and magnified, and if our presentation of the Gospel fails to exhibit that grand fact it is defective and partial. It is "to the praise of the glory of His grace in which He has made us accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). It is "according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). In order that the claims of His righteousness might be met He "spared not His own Son," abating not the least whit that justice demanded. Likewise He is resolved that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). If He would not that the cup of death pass from Christ at His so earnest entreaty, most certain it is that He will not recede one iota from the requirements of His holiness in receiving us into His friendship, and therefore His inexorable demand is, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). For God to pardon those who persisted in their wicked ways would be to condone sin. If there be a revolt in a kingdom, two things are required before peace can be restored and amity again prevail. The king must be willing to exercise clemency on a righteous basis and his subjects must cease their rebellion and become obedient to his sceptre. Orderly government would be reduced to a farce if a pardon was offered unto those who continued to oppose the throne. Now the King of kings has announced His willingness and readiness to pardon any rebel among men, but only on the condition that he first throw down the weapons of his warfare against Him. The carnal mind is enmity against God, and obviously that enmity must cease before we can be reconciled to Him. By nature and practice we are "alienated and enemies in our minds by wicked works" (Col. 1:21), and clearly those works must be confessed and repented of, hated and

abandoned, before there can be peace between us and the thrice Holy One. God does not save us in our sins, but "from our sins" (Matthew 1:21). "But if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the Minister of sin? God forbid" (Gal. 2:17). In his chapter on what God requires from us in order to our reconciliation with God, T. Goodwin pointed out that "1. For the preparing us to be reconciled it is necessary that we be convinced that we are enemies to God, and that He accounts us such; and that so long as we remain in that estate, He is also an enemy to us, and can be no other. This what God in Christ has done gives demonstration of. He would not save us upon Christ's bare entreaty, but He would have satisfaction, and have Christ feel what it was to stand in the room of sinners. Yea, one end why God saved us by way of satisfaction to His justice, was that sinners pardoned might, in what Christ suffered, see and thoroughly apprehend what sin had deserved. And is it not then requisite that they should at least lay to heart and be sensible of their own treason and rebellions, and that God and they are at odds? Traitors must be convicted and condemned before they are capable of a legal pardon, as sentence must be pronounced before a legal appeal can be made. It is so in man's courts, and it is so in God's proceedings also. Neither indeed will men be brought so to sue out for His favor and prize His love till then, for it was never heard any man did heartily sue to one for pardon and peace with whom he did not first apprehend himself at variance. 2. It is necessary also that men apprehend the danger of going on in this estate; for though one should know another and himself to be enemies, if he thought his enemy were either careless or weak, he would slight reconciliation with him, and though sought unto would not seek it. He who is mentioned in Luke 14:31,32 was to sit down and consider if he were able to go out and meet his enemy, else he would never have sought conditions of peace. So the soul, until it apprehends and considers (finding God and itself enemies) what a sore enemy He is and what a fearful thing it is to fall into His hands, will not till then care to seek out to Him. 3. If one apprehended God implacable, not inclined to peace, or hard to be entreated, he would never come at Him either. Thus David, when Saul and he were at odds, suborned Jonathan secretly to observe what mind Saul bare towards him, and when he found him bent to kill him (1 Sam. 20:33), David came not at him. 4. The soul comes to be persuaded better things of God and things that accompany reconciliation, and conceives hope that reconciliation is to be had, and had for it. And therefore in all whom God means to reconcile to Himself, after He has humbled them He fixes a secret persuasion on their hearts that He is ready to be reconciled to them, if they will be reconciled to Him. God gives them a secret hint of His intended good will to them. He reveals what a gracious God He is, and how freely He pardons. . .the same God who from everlasting spake unto His Son and wooed Him for us, does speak likewise secretly (inwardly) to a man's heart to allure and woo him to come into him" (T. Goodwin). In this way overcoming his reluctance, quieting his fears, and making him willing in the day of His power. As He employs the Law to impart a knowledge of sin, to convict us of our high-handed rebellion against the Most High, so He uses the Gospel to make known the wondrous provision He has made both to satisfy the claims of His Law and to meet deep need. If it be asked, Since Christ has satisfied every requirement of God why are repentance and faith necessary from us? What has been said above should furnish a sufficient and satisfactory answer. It is because God is pleased to exercise pardoning mercy in such a way as is suited to all His perfections. It would be contrary to His wisdom to dispense the precious benefits of Christ's atonement to impenitent rebels. It would be contrary unto His governmental honor for Him to cast pearls before swine, to be trampled beneath their feet. It would be contrary unto His holiness for Him to bestow pardon upon one whom He knows would abuse such a favor—as though He granted a dispensatory power for him to sin with impunity. As it is no reflection upon the sufficiency of Christ's satisfaction that believers are called to suffer afflictions and death—for they are not penal inflictions for the satisfying of His justice, but are sent for the exercising of their graces (1 Pet. 1:7); so it in no way derogates from the perfections of Christ's

satisfaction that sinners be required to repent and believe, for there is nothing meritorious about such exercises. Goodwin then went on to point out, the sinner "must be set a-work to seek, as a condemned man, God and His favor in Christ, and peace and reconciliation through Him. He should pray to Him and He will be gracious ... God is the party superior, and it is fit the inferior should seek to the superior. He also is the person wronged, and though He be willing and desirous to be reconciled, yet He will have His favor prized. David longed to be reconciled to Absalom, yet he would be sought unto, for he would have his favor prized to the utmost and not cast away. Yea, and because the favor of God is better than life. He will be sought to with more earnestness and constancy that a man seeks for his life, 'you shall seek Me and find when you shall search for me with all your heart' (Jer. 29:13). 'If God has bidden us seek peace with men, yea, and to ensue it' (Ps. 34:14; 1 Pet. 3:11), that is, though it fly away and though He seems to reject us, yet to press upon Him—as David says my soul follows hard after you (Ps. 63:8). He will be sought unto with confession of and mourning for offending Him, for being in bitterness and mourning is joined with supplication for grace (Zech. 12:10). This is necessary to reconciliation because an acknowledgement is to be made (Jer. 3:13). God would be sought humbly unto by us, as those that are traitors and rebels. God will have men know when He pardons, that he knows what He pardons, and therefore will have them acknowledge what they deserve: 'that every mouth may be stopped and become guilty' (Rom. 3:19). If a man will become wise he must become a fool (1 Cor. 3:18); so a man that will become a friend to God must turn enemy against himself and judge himself worthy of destruction (Ezek. 36:31). . . Where mourning for offending God is wanting, there is no sign of any good will yet wrought in the heart to God nor love to Him, without which God will never accept of a man...God will not pardon till He sees hope of amendment. Now until a man confesses his sin, and that with bitterness, it is an evidence he loves it (Job 20:12-14). While he hides it, spares it, and forsakes it not, it is sweet in his mouth. A man will never leave sin till he finds bitterness in it. He must renounce all other friendships. The nature of reconciliation requires this, for friendship with anything else is enmity with God. 'Yea adulterers and, adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?' (James 4:4). As God will not have us serve other masters. so neither other friends. 'Whosoever does not forsake father and mother, etc., is unworthy of Me' says Christ (Luke 14:26). A friendship not only with proclaimed enemies—pen sins—but with all the things which the world has, is enmity with God. A believer may have a lordship over them, but not friendship with them. He may use them as strangers and servants, but not as friends, so as they have his heart. Friendship is entered into by choice—kindred is not so. So Jonathan chose David to be his friend (1 Sam. 20:30). As God did choose you, so also must you choose Him. As God chose you 'freely' (Hos. 14:4), out of good will, so must you choose Him freely. As He chose you forever, never to cast you off, so you are to choose Him forever. As nothing can separate from His love, so let nothing separate Him from yours. Let your heart resign up itself and all that it has and devote it all unto God forever, to be commanded and used by Him. Thus did God for us — if He spared not His own Son, but with Him also freely gives us all things, let all you have be God's, giving up yourselves first unto the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). Let God have all your understanding, will, affections, and whatever else. And let all be His, to command in any thing as He pleases, and study how to set all a work for Him. Likeness of disposition is the only sure and lasting foundation of friendship, being the soul of it, for it is impossible two should long be friends unless they be one in their minds and affections, liking and loving the same things. 'Can two walk together except they be agreed' (Amos 3:3). Accordingly, a man that is thus reconciled must endeavor to walk and behave himself as a friend. The nature of reconciliation requires it. 'A man that has friends must show himself friendly' (Prov. 18:24). Therefore Christ said, 'You are My friends, if you do whatsoever I command you' (John 15:14). Watch over yourselves in all your ways and be fearful to displease Him and His goodness (Hos. 3:5). God designed to set forth His love so as to attain the ends of

loving. It is not to give forth peace only, but to manifest good will and kindness, as Luke 2:14 shows. Yea, the ground of His showing mercy is His love (Eph. 2:4). And although on our part our love and friendship to God is not the ground of His, yet it is the end or aim of His. Though He did not love us because we loved Him first, yet He loved us that we might love Him in return. Therefore in those He saves, if there were not wrought an inward principle of love and friendship, and good will mutual again to Him, that might answer His love to us, His love would not have its end, and would be finally cast away. For so we reckon love to be given away in loss when it is not answered in its kind, that is, with a true love in response. God would have His love valued and esteemed by those He saves, for love is the dearest thing that anyone has to bestow, because whoever has a man's love has all he has—for it commands all. If God's love be esteemed by us it will work holiness in us" (T. Goodwin, condensed and a few words altered). We have quoted at such length from that excellent Puritan because while T. Goodwin was a high Calvinist (a supralapsarian) and magnified the free and sovereign grace of God as few have done, yet he was also an able evangelist, a faithful shepherd of souls. And though he was a strict particular-redemptionist, yet he also enforced human responsibility. And while he taught clearly the total depravity and utter ruin of fallen man, yet he also shunned not to state plainly and emphatically what God required from the unsaved. We could easily reproduce the same, in substance, from Owen, Manton, Bunyan, and others of the seventeenth century. How far some in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries departed from their teaching we leave the reader to determine, as he may also decide how solemn and serious—or how unimportant—such departure was. Whether the unsaved in many a so-called "place of truth" have been lulled to sleep by a fatalistic presentation of the doctrine of election and by harping so much on the creature's inability to meet God's requirements, or whether they have been faithfully exhorted to repent and believe the Gospel. Should the reader say, I mentally assent to most of what Goodwin wrote, but I find myself totally unable to comply with his directions, we ask, cannot you see that such a statement greatly aggravates your wickedness? Suppose I have grievously wronged and offended a dear friend of yours, and you came to me saying you deplored the breach between us, that your friend was willing to be friends again if I would put matters right and beg forgiveness. Suppose you pleaded with me to do the proper thing, and the only reply I made you was, I am unable to. What would you think? Would you not justly conclude that all I lacked was a willing heart? That the reason I would not seek unto the one I had injured was either because I hated him or because I was too proud to humble myself before him? You would judge rightly! So it is with the sinner and God. If we analyze his "cannot" it is because he is so wedded to his idols, so in love with sin, he will not forsake them. And anything in our preaching which comforts him in his "will not" is contrary to Truth.

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